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ABSTRACT

Maintaining that the environment in general and schools in particular largely influence whether an individual's talents will be identified/encouraged or ignored/discouraged, the document focuses on ways to identify and stimulate talents in socially underprivileged individuals. The study was based on two approaches. The first approach, systems theory, was used to develop an analytical framework. According to the systems theory approach, systems (including organizations such as schools and families) are classified according to the nature of their relationship with the surrounding environment. In addition, laws are sought which govern the behavior of each part of the system and the interaction between the system and the environment. The second approach, a case study or 'life histories' approach, was used to show how several individuals in a poor rural setting achieved a success or failure status and either did or did not develop a potential talent. Examples are presented of the ways in which an individual's talent or self-esteem is influenced through interaction with school, society, family, and cultural groups. For instance, an individual's self-esteem can suffer if he/she perceives low achievement in school and can suffer further if the family exhibits high anxiety in response to perceived or actual low achievement. Because findings from much of the literature on poverty and achievement indicate that poverty reinforces failure in school, the authors suggest that educators try especially hard to reverse these tendencies toward failure. Suggestions for reinforcing potential talents include that educators design curricula which are appropriate for individual needs, refrain from judging students as low achievers because they have low social status and poor school records, and assume that all students--and, particularly, underprivileged ones--possess undiscovered intellectual potential. (DB)

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THE IDENTIFICATION OF TALENTS IN SOCIALLY UNDERPRIVELEGED GROUPS

The Place of Success and Failure in a Pattern of Social Interaction.

SP 013 056

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S U M M A R Y

THEME: The Identification of Talents in Socially Underprivileged Groups.
The Place of Success and Failure in a Pattern of Social Interaction.

APPROACH: The theme success- failure is interpreted (even though it is a phenomenon appearing in the individual considered as an entity of psychological behaviour), as an element within the web of interactions of the individual with his environment.

It is analyzed in two transactional levels: individual-environment and school-environment.

The school and the environment provide evaluation instances of great incidence in the processes of identification and preservation of talents or, on the other hand, of their disregard and discouragement.

CONTENTS: There are two patterns of social interaction offered: one for each transactional level, consisting of various elements which interact with each other in different ways depending on whether they form a part of a stimulative or an inhibitory system of the individual's potential. Of these two patterns, only one of them is analyzed.

The patterns of social interaction shown in the diagram permits the analysis of the process generating from self-perception (positive or negative), having an incidence on the affective field and showingits pertinent effects in the normative and institutional field.

METHODOLOGICAL

PROPOSALS: An exploratory study based on "life histories" and on "analysis of anthropological files" is proposed as a basis for the elaboration of the instruments which purports to evaluate aptitudes such as: creativity, critical thinking, imagination, etc.

The data regarding rational judgements and emotional reactions, which these sources provide, illustrate aspects of personality and the resources available to arrive at the gathering of knowledge, the creation of inventions, the trying out of devices to overcome environmental limitations, etc.

PURPOSE: To provide elements for the stimulative system, so that the manifestation and the preservation of talents is facilitated.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF TALENTS IN SOCIALLY UNDERPRIVELEGED GROUPS.-

The Place of Success and Failure in a Pattern of Social Interaction.-

1.- Organization of the Conceptual Framework

The general theme limits us to the identification of the "gifted" in socially underpriveleged groups. According to this, two aspects must be considered: on the one hand, we are trying to identify persons with a special characteristic -their talent-,and on the other, to place them in a specific context, in which different patterns of interaction between these individuals and differentiated areas of their environment originate.

Our theoretical focus is based on the "systems theory". We think it provides us with conceptual material suited to the treatment of the problem. It provides us with two fundamental ideas for the analysis of the social context where the patterns of interaction considered here take place; namely, the reciprocal relationships within the model, ordering the different aspects of every social system, and the morphogenetic property of instances and processes which unfold there.

It is a useful approach, as Buckley points out, "not

only to state the causes acting upon phenomena, the possible consequences of the phenomena and the possible interactions of some of these factors, but to perceive the total emergent processes as function of possible positive and negative feedbacks, by means of the selective decisions or choices of the individuals or the groups involved".

Because of the widespread knowledge of this approach, we will avoid the consideration of theoretical details, but we wish to point out that, within our general framework, we are using the notion of organization, be it the school or the employment organization, as a set of differentiated substructures which require integration. These substructures are basically two: functional and communicative. They are interconnected withing each particular system and, moreover, they are connected to differentiated aspects of the environment. In order to last, the system depends on elements which are outside the system itself.

Shools, as well as organizations where an individual works, are open systems and, the more adequate the interchange between the individual and his social environment is, the more capable he will be to react to the changes of the environment without losing his identity, and, on the other hand, he will be able to reform or innovate when the evaluation of these changes deems it advisable.

Within each system being considered, our unit of analysis is the individual with a potential talent, which can or cannot be developed effectively, depending on the courses of action in the areas of contact within his sphere of activity. A complex network of human relationships determine, to a great extent, the personal behaviour from the transactional level, which is the most intrinsic, that is, the role playing in the different groups to which the individual belongs. These, in turn, are fundamental in the understanding of the patterns of interaction and the processes related to these.

There are two systems operating in the different levels of transaction of the individual with differentiated areas of his environment: an inhibitory system and a stimulative system of that talent.

For the sake of analysis, the transactional level individual-schoool is considered.

The school is an evaluating instance of great incidence in the processes of identification and preservation of talents, or, on the other hand, of ignorance and discouragement of these talents. In the first case, the experience of "success", corroborated by the acceptance of the new member by the group, the obtaining of course credits, the corresponding promotion to a higher grade, as part of a pedagogical task, leads the individual to develop a feeling

of self-esteem, which will generally accompany him in his performance within other spheres. On the contrary, when the school simply punishes, without this punishment forming part of a deeply responsible pedagogical task in the future life of a person, the consequences of the transaction of the individual with the school can be reflected in the self-perception of failure as well as in giving up or dropping aut of school. These decisions may be accompanied, from a psychological point of view, by a deep feeling of low self-esteem, caused by a negative evaluation of himself. From a social point of view, dropping out of school can lead to inmediate underemployment or unemployment when he becomes an adult.

The pattern of interaction individual-school is not restricted to the confines of the latter. The school curriculum can reveal areas of close contact between school and family, or, on the contrary, separation between them. The consequences on school success or failure can also be analyzed at this level.

The family is the first organization, which sets up goals for its members. These objectives, explicit or implicit, guide the behaviour of individuals, and are shown in most of the activities of their daily life. When one of the members perceives the first sumptons of failure in school, the family can show a reasonable quota of anxiety,

which, to a certain extent, may back up the individual and serve to balance the elements which are inhibiting the growth of his self-esteem. In families belonging to different social groups, this quota of anxiety can grow to the point of producing negative effects upon the personality of the member who fails.

In families belonging to socially and economically privileged groups, this latter phenomenon is more frequent because they are very sensitive to the failure of their members. However, instead of overcharging them with anxiety, they help their members with elements which work hand in hand with the stimulative system of the school. In this the family places heavy emphasis upon imparting those skills which will lead to success and teaches them to their members.

The social and emotional stability that characterizes this type of family is a help, because the active participation of both father and mother, in the schooling process, greatly contributes to its success.

On the contrary, poverty, as an environment, does not favour the acquisition of those personality traits which would be useful in overcoming failure. Instead, it reinforces failure in school. Poor families seem to have a pattern of social relations with the school, such thar the tasks and skills expected by the school, cannot be easily

transmitted to the children. There is, perhaps, a realistic judgement in this: a poor family lacks the means to ensure motivation through achievement because it "lives in a world of anxiety about the inmediate provision of its basic needs". In accord with this, the member of this type of family is likely to drop out of school. This behaviour is motivated by the fact that, in this environment, it is difficult for the individuals to face its continuous contingencies, and, in addition, the relations between the educational groups, show meager gratification.

The family not only perceives the first symptons of failure, but it can also become a barrier in the transactional level individual-school, deviating its members' activity to the fulfilment of the tasks within their reach. This may not be called "lack of interest for the school on the part of the parents"; on thecontrary, it reflects an attitude, as it was said before, much more realistic, but, from our point of view, also inhibitory of any possibility of detecting potential talents. Even so, the separation between both contexts widens.

We are not only interested in the contact between both spheres, but also in their nature.

The effects of the lack or the existence of adjustment between the social characteristics of the individual and

the groups where be acts, are described in many sociological studies. The social characteristics of an individual, or those of his sphere of activity do not determine anything by themselves: it is the relationship which exists between the two that really counts; that is, their adjustment or disadjustment.

Young people educated in different social contexts show certain psychic effects resulting from this situation; that is to say, the individuals tend to display emotional disturbances. An individual, isolated from the group which supports him, will face without success the trials which his inmediate environment -the school- will submit him to.

Prejudice and cultural differences are accentuated when schools located in poor rural areas develop curricula meant for city areas. This makes it very difficult for students in rural areas to arrive at the objectives proposed in and for such different circunstances. This predetermined lack of achievement, makes us consider some of them as failures and we set them apart from the rest. The danger exists that this be a judgement motivated by the social status of the students and that we define them because of their inferiority and not because of their yet undiscovered intellectual potential. In addition, the social judgement can be based on common evaluative standards and not on a concept of evaluation that forms part of a real educational process.

The above stated points out who are the ones who are more likely to be subject to negative experiences, rather than to receive the stimuli they need to demonstrate the optitudes which they might possess. This situation is intensified in some transactional levels.

A program, which intends to detect and recover potential talents must depend on two types of diagnosis: one, concerning the individual; and another, for the areas and means of transaction. In these, there could be disagreement and unwanted effects with respect to the individual, as well as to the organizations where he acts.

In general, the aspects analyzed with respecto to the school, can be transferred to another transactional level: individual-employment.

Herzberg and Myers suggest that individuals in their transactions with organizations are motivated by their desire to use their ability to solve problems.

The pattern of motivation, values, self-esteem, lack of self-esteem, together with the history of personal success and faiture depend on the biological characteristics and life experiences. These experiences accumulate before each problem situation and can diminish or increase the disadjustment between the individual and the environment of the organization where he works.

Here, too, we find evident the importance of a diagnosis of motivations, expectations and attitudes of an individual who interacts in this transactional level and the inhibitory and stimulative elements offered by the entity in question.

The individual could have learned his "role as failure" in previous levels, and arrive at such a quota of self disesteem, as to fear being ridiculed and not dare to demonstrate his potential for inventiveness and/or originality. There are individuals who possess a high potential for talent, without having been permitted to make it effective by their employment opportunities. Nevertheless, they have not been blocked by failure; their needs and demands can impel them to demonstrate extraordinary aptitudes. But this is an exception.

In general, talents decline before the barriers of an inhibitory system, where the early detection of talent and its preservation are not elements of the philosophy, on which they are based.

The diagram number 1 shows a pattern of social interaction with reference to the inhibitory and stimulative systems that act in the transactional level analyzed here.

This diagram stresses some of the consequences of the transaction -positive or negative-, which might have been experienced by certain individuals.

The analysis of the inhibitory system suggests that the poor rural groups cannot mantain an efficient pattern of interaction. The morphogenetic property of the system promises changes in each of the areas of contact between individual-environment.

One of our first tasks would aim to identify gifted individuals in the rural areas. It has been considered inappropriate to resort to intelligence tests and validated aptitudes in contexts different from the one intended to be studied; not only for lack of adequate standard, but also because the "values of reality" in a poor rural context seldom coincide with those where such instruments are generally used. It has been considered that the most adequate instrument could be the biography of the individuals known as "gifted" by their own community or neighbours. Each life history could provide elements to discriminate the predominant characteristics in the behaviour, characterized by its potential for talent, allowing at the same time, the discovery of patterns of interaction where this potential is stimulated or "withered in the bud". We would have the basic instrument, with which to back the elaboration of adequate specific instruments to detect talents in the areas of reference.

In this same sense, it can be useful to consider the anthropological files that, in this case, would be the

object of a new content analysis.

Our conceptual model, incomplete in this exposition, orients us in the search of the empirical support needed to validate it.

Within a short time,-March to April, 1980-, we have begun the exploration of a methodological framework which may permit us to find such support.

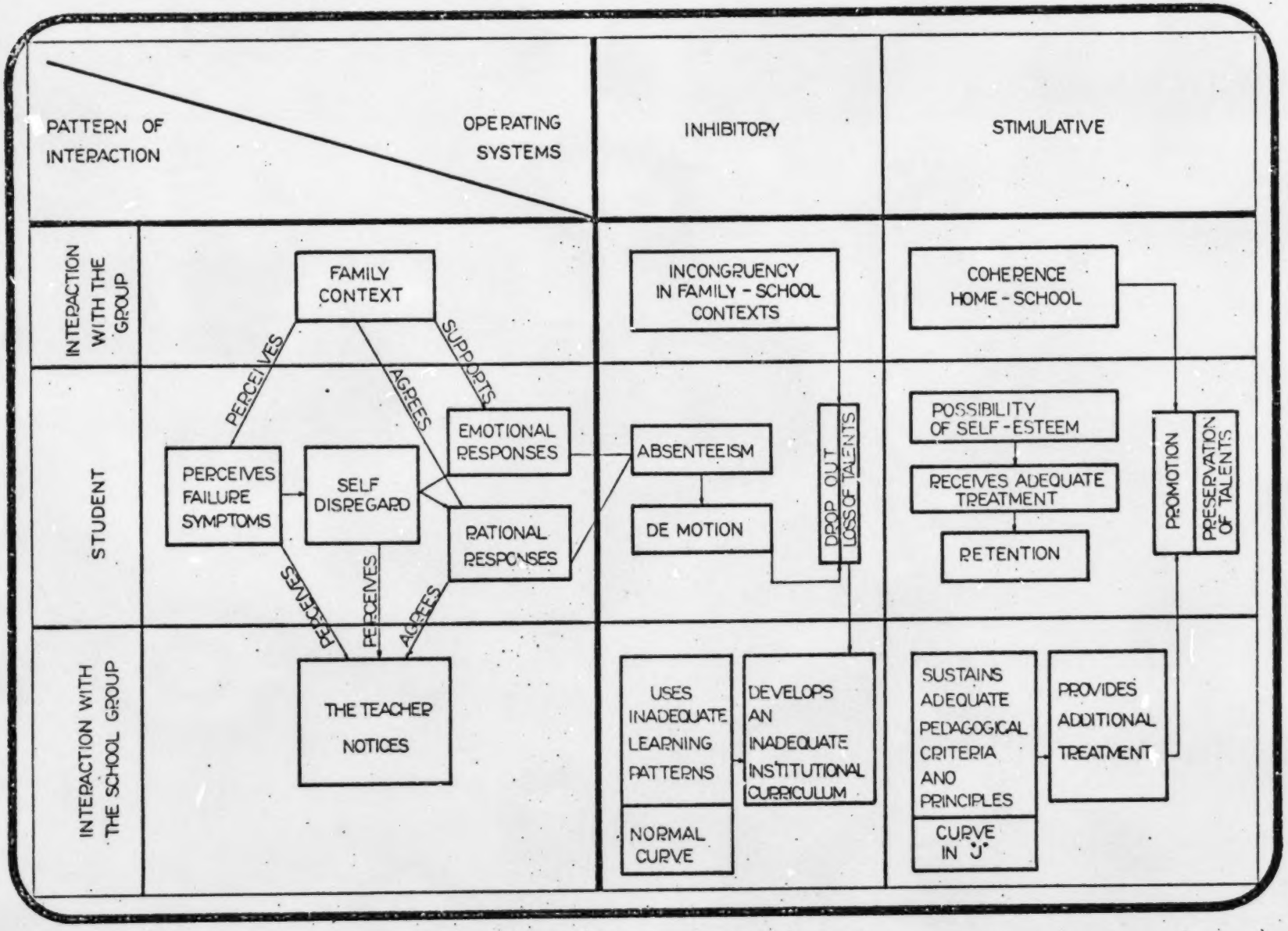

DIAGRAM 1 - A pattern of social interaction

2.- Initial Exploratory Study: Methodology Employed

Our project is interested in detecting potential talents, as well as in evaluating their inhibitory or stimulative systems. Within the relative modest scope of the present research work, we have applied the following metholological guide:

a) A selected rural area was visited taking into consideration the requerements of this project.

b) A key informant was sought out to provide the names of the individuals, whom the community recognizes as ingenious or having a "natural talent".

c) The names of eight individuals were obtained and they were interviewed personally.
Henceforth they will be referred to as our informants.

d) After giving them a short explanation of our purposes they were asked to tell the story of their lives (life histories).

e) After these histories were obtained, the material was analyzed.

2.1.- Characterization of the informants

2.1.1.- From the point of view of other members of the community.

The informants seem to be considered as a "prototype" category within the social context to which they pertain. There is a public recognition of their skills, abilities and productivity. But, even though this recognition exists, they cannot be considered as leaders within their comunity. On the contrary, the neighbours emphasize the fact that they possess personal characteristics which justify labelling them as: "crazy", "difficult", "unadapted to their environment", "very intelligent but strange", etc, etc. That is to say, they will constitute the "prototype of the atypical".

Within a routine context they represent something different. The environment seems to recognize in them, a degree of individuality that, to a certain extent, isolates them from the rest.

It is probable that, as Guilford states, creative persons are highly individualistic.

We have found one unique case among those interviewed, who has the general support of his neighbours. His "gifts" are recognized and he is considered a "success" in school as well as at work. The pattern of interaction he has developed has, in addition, given him access to broader well-reputed contexts, outside the one from his own

community.

2.1.2.- From the methodological point of view.

On the basis of technical requirements, which ought to be present in the "life histories", our informants are characterized by:

a) Immediate understanding of the explanation given by the interviewer and direct access to the requested information.

b) Maximum collaboration with the interviewer.

c) Ability to communicate his biographical data in an intelligible manner.

d) Capacity to uncover each talent they seem to possess and to offer convincing proofs regarding them.

The verification of the data compiled was made by analyzing the internal consistency of the taped material and the reports of other members of the same community, which corroborated the information given by the ones who narrated their autobiography.

The reliability of the material has been estimated by the agreement among the informants

questioned and by the relation between the documentary evidence (letters, photographs, certificates) and the various narrated biographical facts.

2.1.3.- From the point of view of the characteristics of the analyzed material.

The "life histories" lend themselves to be organized with reference to the possibility of finding clues which lead us to the identification of real talents among those interviewed.

It can be said that the most common characteristics to all individuals who were pointed out as "being gifted" in their own community, are the following:

- Fluidity of ideas
- Flexibility of thought
- Practical imagination
- Originality and inventiveness
- Capacity for re-defining common objects
- Ability to evaluate and plan when solving problems

The recorded reports permit the identification of the elements (barriers and stimuli) belonging to

the systems called inhibitory and stimulative systems and their relationships within a given pattern of interactions.

Of the eight sample cases that have been analyzed, the six that seem to be most creative,have given up formal education or they have never attended school; they work on their own and seem to possess a self-perception of success quite different from the meaning generally assigned to this word.

Of the two remaining cases, one has achieved a good economic status, whose origin has nothing to do with the signs of his practical imagination and, the most skilful of the sample group has a permanent occupation. One of them has finished his primary education and the other has completed four years in an industrial arts school.

All the informants work to earn their own living and have another job as a hobby, where they feel they are creative, showing pride and a lot of satisfaction in doing it.

The life histories of all these individuals provide sufficient elements as to go more deeply

into the concepts of our framework and then, try to find the necessary empirical support to arrive at duly validated conclusions.

LIFE HISTORIES

Two Cases

Informants	Basic Characteristics	Educational level, work activity, productivity, and some personal opinions
1	Male. Age: 28 Single Dwelling: good, well-built, comfortable.	Education: incomplete secondary level- up to third year in a technical school Reasons for leaving school: "In school I was bored. It's a place where they don't know what to do with one's hands. They don't make use of them." Previous work: "make things" Present work: "make things... provided they are difficult." Idea of what a job must be: "Real work is a hobby. What I really like to do is what is difficult; as if it were a challenge. When I do this I feel proud and satisfied. The other kind of work is only a means to earn my living.(.) (.) He goes in for fishing and hunting hares during two months a year. This represents an approximate income of six hundred dollars, which he turns over to his family for the most part, as his contribution for its maintenance. In this way his family "leaves

Informants	Basic Characteristics	Educational level, work activity, productivity, and some personal opinions
		him alone" to do what he really likes the rest of the year. Idea of what knowledge is: "Almost everything has already been invented. What everybody does now is to improve on what others have done. The laws of physics, for example, are stated in any high school manual. The only thing you need to know is how to apply them". Productivity: A telescope, a helicopter motor boats, "karting", centrifugal gear systems, shotguns, rifles, pistols metal bows, motor cycles, engines, slings with a telescopic sight, devices for fishing with a great number of hooks reels (to catch sharks), saws for cutting cane, a round-shaped house, a special device for collarbone fractures, a breathing device to be used during anæsthesia, a laryngoscope for children (a model completely new, as there isn't any other).

Informants	Basic Characteristics	Educational level, work activity, productivity, and some personal opinions.
2	Female. Age: 33 Married, two children. Dwelling: not good(precarious)	Education: She never attended school. She is illiterate. Reasons for not attending school: She has worked for her living since she was a young girl. Previous work: She milked cows and did farm work. Present work: She repairs transistor radios in her own home. (.) (.) As a hobby she has another job: she works as an amateur radio operator. She has obtained a promotion and now works for an emergency network service, at night. Idea of what a job must be: "It's nice to work doing something that one likes". Her present job is done "with love". She finds great satisfaction in the detection of errors and in solving problems derived from them, as well as in calculating the values of resistances, for example.

Informants	Basic Characteristics	Educational level, work activity, productivity, and some personal opinions.
		Idea of what knowledge is: "I want my children to have the toys I never had and the studies I could never get." She believes it is never too late to learn and plans to learn how to read and write, which will enable her to do all the things she can't do now because of her illiteracy. "But it's not only knowledge which is needed, but also moral standards. And those I have never lacked: the morality my grandparents and my parents taught me." Productivity: She owns a small repair shop where she assembles small transistor radio sets.

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